



August 26, 2020

The Honorable David S. Ferriero,  
Archivist of the United States of America  
The National Archives and Records Administration  
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW.  
Washington, DC 20408-0001

Dear Archivist Ferriero,

My name is Geoff Gentilini and I write today to formally introduce myself and the organization I represent, the Archival Researchers Association (ARA). This new not-for-profit organization is committed to advocating for those who require access to government records held in state and federal archives, and record centers. Our members are researchers, authors, historians, genealogists, private organizations, the self-employed, and small businesses who value the right to physically access the historical records of our democracy.

Our association's purpose is to advocate for access to the public records in NARA's care for the benefit of our members and the public at large. We understand that inadequate funding in recent years has, at times, resulted in cuts to records access for the public. We intend to work alongside Congress and other like-minded organizations to secure additional funding for in-person services, and we hope to work with you and your staff as well, to find solutions to funding challenges.

We are stakeholders who use archival records nationwide and who are uniquely qualified to inform the development of policy that will impact researchers in the future. We embrace NARA's mission and values statement, proclaiming that public access to high-value government records strengthens our nation's democracy and brings greater meaning to the American experience.

Those of us who depend on access to historical records in a professional capacity are currently experiencing significant financial hardship, as are other small businesses nationwide. We recognize the challenges COVID presents for in-person research and have waited five months to learn when we might reenter NARA research rooms to continue our work. We realize that there will need to be changes made to NARA's research procedures. However, our members are deeply concerned that temporary limitations to records access based on personal safety will remain in place even after the threat of COVID has subsided.

*We would like to hear from you personally about the planning in progress now for the reopening of NARA facilities to patrons.*

We want to assure you that the establishment of our organization is not an effort to force an unsafe reopening of NARA facilities. We support your efforts to protect staff and the public using science-based safety measures. We also recognize the need for NARA staff to innovate to address the substantive

issues likely to emerge in the coming weeks, months, and years due to COVID related damage to our nation's finances, economy, and to businesses large and small. We encourage you to view our new association as a unique opportunity to secure increased funding for research services and to work alongside citizens who value access to government records.

We look forward to working with you and your agency to ensure continued and improved access to the historical records of our democracy.

Sincerely,



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